

FIRST UNITARIAN FOCUS



Congregation established 1836

Newsletter of the First Unitarian Church

Alton, Illinois
110 East 3rd Street (location)
PO Box 494 62002 (mail)

Office phone: 618-462-2462
<https://www.firstuualton.org/>



May 2021

Sunday Worship at 10:00 a.m.
May 2021 Theme: "UNION"

The services will premiere at 10:00 a.m. on our church's YouTube site.
Click on the YouTube icon in the upper right corner of the church's website.

Due to technical issues, sometimes the services do not upload exactly at 10 a.m.
Check for a message on the UU Friends Facebook page regarding the start of any service.

Our live Zoom "Coffee and Conversation" time follows at 11:00 a.m. at the Zoom link below.
<https://siue.zoom.us/j/726948775> (that's a j not an i) - PASSWORD: 551868

May 2, 2021 at 10:00 a.m.

Speaker: Rev. Dr. Claudia Hall

Sermon Title: "Jewish / UU Connection"

May 9, 2021 at 10:00 a.m. (Mother's Day)

Flower Communion – details forthcoming

May 16, 2021 at 10:00 a.m.

Speaker: Joy Hoeft

Sermon Title: "The people who influenced Unitarianism in America from the 18th-20th century; as well as the Transcendentalists and the Humanists."

This is the third in a series of seven, once-a-month services entitled "Unitarian and Universalist History and the People who Influenced our Faith."

May 23, 2021 at 10:00 a.m.

Speaker: Tracey Howe-Koch

May 30, 2021 at 10:00 a.m.

Speaker: Dennis Fisher

Worship Associate: Peg Flach

If people need help with doing their worship service videos, please get in touch with Alex J. Hoeft alex.j.hoeft@gmail.com. He would like to have the videos at least by the Friday before your service.

President's Column

As I look back over the last church year, I am honored to have been able to lead our church through a challenging few months. I want to celebrate the good things I have seen.

First and foremost, thanks again to our previous Board for their hard work identifying and addressing the financial difficulties we encountered with the embezzlement. They implemented a plan that has enabled us to be financially stable this fiscal year, and it is our intention to keep this structure from here on out. Without their hard work, the damage could have been much greater. As well, our current Board has been outstanding. I am grateful to each and every one who have given so much to keep our congregation afloat while we have been working virtually! I could not ask for a greater group of people to lead this congregation.

Our budget is in a solid place, largely because of the system implemented by the previous board but also because we have pared down our expenses by not having a minister, and due to working virtually through the pandemic. We have been using our funds to support our guest speakers for Sunday services and invest in Buildings and Grounds to deal with long neglected repairs and maintenance. As well, we have been able to return funds to our endowment which was slowly being depleted due to the embezzlement issue. We have also had GENEROUS donations from so many in our congregation, both members and non-members alike. By the end of the year we anticipate exceeding our pledge campaign, which brings tears of joy to my eyes! We'll report more on that during our year-end meeting in June.

And Worship ... wowza! Thank you to our amazing Worship Associates who have generously given of their time and talent, and stretched themselves in ways we did not expect before we went into this pandemic and then subsequently lost our minister last year. Each and every one of them pushed themselves out of their comfort zone and delivered sermons that were heart felt and meaningful for our congregants. I am also grateful for the creativity each person brought to the table to bring in guest speakers and considered ways to collaborate with other congregations for variety in the services we could

deliver to you all. I have enjoyed our coffee hours greatly and it is wonderful to see everyone's face on a weekly basis. If you have not joined us, please do! We miss you all! As well, we are purchasing equipment to continue live streaming our services on a weekly basis so we can be live in church and still reach out to those unable to attend church in our building.

Buildings and Grounds has been led by Michael Tarabulski and Nathan Brown, with the support of so many who have come to work on the grounds and building throughout the year. We are working on the security cameras to get them installed. Weather and structural constraints have made it difficult for us to get them all installed but we are hoping to resolve that soon. We have painted, pulled weeds, planted a pollinator garden, cleaned and rearranged the kitchen and the Wuerker and Emerson Rooms, and had shrubs trimmed along the corner of Alby and 3rd. We recognize that we have some hard decisions ahead of us regarding keeping the building and grounds and we have been in discussion with folks in Alton about our need for handicapped accessibility and better parking. I am unsure we will have the answers we want but I want people to be prepared that we may have to make a tough decision sooner than later on this topic if we want to remain financially solvent and still continue to do our mission in the community.

Lastly, I am thrilled that we are slowly but surely able to return to our social justice mission. Last Spring when we had to suspend our 4th Saturday distributions due to the pandemic, we donated a large number of items to a group in Alton who had a better system in place to reach those in need. In April of this year, we finally opened up the distribution again and we anticipate the need to expand even more in the months to come. As well, we have a number of folks who are busy coming up with a list of things we can do to practice our mission and support the greater Alton community. These activities will need volunteers ... even just an hour or two on occasion ... to get our name and face back out into the community. Please consider helping as you are able!

I look forward to sharing more with you at our year end meeting. In the meantime, consider what you can do for stewardship ... including your time, talent, and treasure ... to help the church. Look for more information from the Stewardship Team in the next few weeks. Also, put your wish list together ... if we want to move forward as a congregation, we need your ideas, your vision, and your energy to help our congregation thrive!

Sending you love and light,
Robyn

Memorial Service



There will be a Memorial Service on the church grounds on Sunday afternoon May 16th at 4 p.m. to celebrate the life of

Sharona Johnson.

Bring a chair or blanket to sit on. Covid safety guidelines will be followed.

Among Our Church Family

Please keep **Carol McGrew** in your thoughts and prayers. She will be having foot surgery in mid-May.

Ginger McCall celebrated her 90th birthday on April 27th with a gathering of friends and family at LeClaire Park in Edwardsville.

Welcome to new member, **Greg Gaines**. Greg signed the membership book at Workday on April 17th. He lives in Bridgeton MO and we've enjoyed getting to know him during our Zoom coffee hours.



The **Men's Group** will be meeting for lunch (yes – in person) on Thursday, May 13th at 11:30 a.m. at **Bakers & Hale**

(<https://bakershale.com>)

7120 Montclair Ave., Godfrey IL 62035. It is on a cross street near the interchange of expressway IL 255 and Rt 67.

Nick Pendergrass writes *“It seems that we are all vaccinated, and it was proposed that we meet next time at Bakers & Hale in Godfrey. I checked it out and it does indeed have a large outdoor dining area, covered and uncovered. Both areas were just partly full, and tables were scattered nicely. Please mark your calendars and try to meet with us in person on May 13th at 11:30 a.m.”*

If you have questions, or to get on the Men's Group notification email list, contact Nick at npendergrass@me.com.

Church Board News

The Board will have its regular monthly meeting via Zoom on Tuesday, May 11th from 6 to 8 p.m. If there are items you would like the Board to address, please contact Robyn Berkley. robynberkley@yahoo.com

The position of President-Elect for this coming church year is open. If you are interested in learning more about this position, please contact Robyn.

- Our endowment fund has reached \$210,787.
- Our income to date is \$71,232 with expenses of \$39,123.
- We have engaged a lawn mowing service for the summer months, as well as have hired a carpet cleaning company to deep clean the RE hall carpet.
- Plans for the placement of the security cameras as well as the obtaining of better sound equipment is underway.
- The annual Stewardship pledge drive will begin in May. Stewardship includes the giving of time, talent, as well as treasure (i.e., financial support).
- A Pandemic Task Force has been formed to plan for the church reopening. Members of the task force are: Mary Weber, Wayne & Jen Politsch, Ed Navarre, Marci Bennett, and Robyn Berkley.

WORKDAY – May 8th – 9:00 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Although we have contracted with a lawn service to mow the grass at church, there is still work to be done by members and friends. The weeds don't stop growing, the ivy keeps climbing up the walls, the decorative grasses grow over the sidewalks, and gardening tasks are ongoing. So, if you have an interest in maintaining the grounds, or are more interested in working on indoor projects please come to workday and share in the fellowship of working together.

A Note from the STEWARDSHIP Team

Pssst! Pssst!
(motions to discretely get your attention) I'm just gonna whisper this, okay?



The “S” word is coming.

You know, that time of year when the church asks for your financial help, or for a pledge of volunteer time.

What? wait no....
The “S” word is not “sommambulate.”
Where did you even get that idea?
No, the “S” word is
“Stewards**p”

No, I know it's not a dirty word.
But people still hate it. So, I bleeped it out.
What? Why are you going after me about bleeping it out?
You thought it was sommambulate!

Look, it doesn't matter.
Just know that it's coming
And understand that

It is the most important year in the church's history.

Eric Johnson & Robyn Berkley
Your **Stewardship** Team

UUA General Assembly

The Annual Meeting (i.e., General Assembly) of Unitarian Universalists will be June 23 – June 27, 2021. As last year, this General Assembly will be virtual. Registration is \$200 per person and that will give you access to all the workshops, worship services, and presentations offered. To register go to <https://www.uua.org/ga/registration>.

Worship Associates

From Robyn

I want to take this time to thank **Peg Flach** for her service to the church as a Worship Associate for the last few years. This year in particular, her creativity and hard work really reflected in a wide variety of services we could offer our congregation during this pandemic and time of remote services. I am forever in her debt for her hard work stepping in to guide the Worship Associates when I transitioned to the Presidency. Peg has decided it is time to step back from this obligation and I am asking each of you to join me in thanking her for her time and efforts.

We are looking to add another member to our worship team. It is an awesome responsibility to be a part of the Worship Team. And without a minister, this role is even more important. As we transition to hybrid services, we need people who are willing to lead services in both virtual and face to face format and bring creative energy to expand the type of offerings we bring to First UU. We are purchasing equipment that will allow us to live stream our services on the Internet so we can continue to reach our congregants in a safe manner. We have a lot of great ideas and need help implementing them. I know that this year has stretched me in a good way with respect to my own spirituality and empowered me to think more deeply about how important it is to be a UU and live and walk our values on a daily basis. If you feel so called, we welcome your addition to our worship team!

Contact Robyn Berkley (robynberkley@yahoo.com) if you would like to learn more about serving as a Worship Associate.

Amazon Smile

If you shop on Amazon, you can register the First Unitarian Church of Alton at smileamazon.com and the church will then receive up to 0.5% of the cost of your order. It's not a lot, but every little bit helps.

4th Saturday Personal Care Distribution



After a hiatus of over a year, we restarted the personal care distribution program on April 24th.

Unfortunately, it was a very rainy day, and the word hadn't gotten around to our usual 50 – 60 attendees that we were open, so we only had 9 people stop by for products.

Thanks to Robyn, Sam, Nathan, and Jerry for their help in staffing the distribution room, and to Wayne for helping unload the boxes and bags of products from the van.

However, I expect that our May 22nd Distribution will be better attended. Initially it will be different from previous years. Volunteers and attendees will be required to wear masks – we have masks to give out to those needing them. We will not have a hospitality room with snacks and beverages, and those coming for products will not be entering the building. Social distancing will be required.

However, to have all this happen we need at least 4 volunteers who have completed their vaccination regimen. You would need to plan to arrive by 10:30 a.m. and could leave when we close at 12:30 p.m.

Reminders will be posted in UU Friends. If you have questions, want to volunteer, or have ideas about how to proceed with the distribution process, contact Mary Johnson mejohanson@mindspring.com.

Financial Donations to the Church

You can now make a financial donation to the church through PayPal. The blue logo icon is in the upper right-hand corner of the church's homepage <http://www.firstuualton.org/>.



You may also donate using Givelify. Click on the large green square on the church's homepage.

Or mail your check to the church at PO 494 Alton, IL 62002.

Women's Alliance Scholarship The Women's Alliance of the First Unitarian Church of St. Louis Announces its Scholarship Competition for the academic year 2021-2022

Initiated by a generous bequest from the estate of Edna Landzettel, a lifelong teacher and proponent of the importance of education in a woman's life, the scholarship will be given to a woman who is 21 years or older, responsible financially for continuing her education, a member or active friend of a Unitarian Universalist church or fellowship in the region and a registered student.

The award of \$3,000 will be made on the basis of scholarship, character and need.

All the information is on the website: <https://www.firstuustlouis.org/>

CHURCH LEADERSHIP as of May 2021 2020 - 2021

Board Members

President: Robyn Berkley

robynberkley@yahoo.com

Secretary: Mary Johnson

mejohanson@mindspring.com

Treasurer: Nathan Brown

nathan.brown0621@outlook.com

Member at Large: Aiden Crist arexboi@gmail.com

Member at Large: Alex Hoeft

alex.j.hoeft@gmail.com

Member at Large: Carol McGrew

carol_mcgrew@yahoo.com

Member at Large: Pat Moore

patjimmoore@charter.net

President Elect: To be Determined.

The next Church Newsletter deadline is May 25th.

Send news items to Mary Johnson

mejohanson@mindspring.com